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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001149

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: INSIDE BURMA'S NLD PARTY: YOUNG TURKS VS OLD LIONS

REF: A. RANGOON 1090 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1035 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)C. RANGOON 924

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The National League for Democracy (NLD) held a series of recent meetings that pitted state and divisional party officials (younger leaders who demand a pro-active stance approach to the regime) against members of the NLD Central Executive Committee (octogenarians who are disinclined to stir the SPDC hornet's nest in the absence of the NLD's detained senior leaders). The regime, meanwhile, believes that it has rendered the NLD increasingly incapable of mounting a serious threat, an assessment that may underestimate the NLD's capacity to remain a thorn in the thigh of totalitarian rule. Nonetheless, with Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) under house arrest, most offices shuttered, and lessening international pressure on the Burmese regime, the NLD has hit an all-time low point. The growing chorus of voices from among the NLD's younger members demanding party action is one indication that the status quo is creating considerable frustration within the pro-democracy movement. Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) From August 25-30 the NLD CEC hosted a six-day seminar at Rangoon headquarters with several dozen of the party's state and divisional leaders. According to party Chairman U Aung Shwe, the session was a productive effort to address numerous party issues, but he admitted that emotions ran high during contentious discussions regarding potential party actions and demands from the ranks for leadership changes.

[1](#)3. (C) Seven members of the nine-member CEC (whom the SPDC detained after the May 2003 Depeyin attack but subsequently released between November 2003 and April 2004) began an executive meeting on September 1 to analyze and discuss the results of their seminar with local party leaders. However, according to party sources, the CEC is not inclined to implement any of the recommendations put forth by the regional leaders while CEC members ASSK and U Tin Oo remain under house arrest. Recommendations from the rank and file membership included the following:

--Expand the Central Executive Committee: Local leaders would like to see more diversity on the CEC, including women and youth. However, the current CEC members say that an expansion is not in the party's by-laws and, furthermore, is impossible to undertake without the presence of ASSK and U Tin Oo (Note: the CEC has nine members and one vacancy. U Kyi Maung, who passed away on August 26, resigned in 1998 after a falling-out with ASSK and was not replaced).

--Expand the Central Committee: In theory, local NLD members elect the 30 members of the Central Committee (CC) who, in turn, appoint or elect the CEC. In practice, top party leaders (ASSK, U Tin Oo, or U Aung Shwe) have hand-picked members of the CEC and the CC. As with the CEC, NLD members would like to see more women and youth on the Central Committee. However, in 1989 the then-SLORC jailed or forced the retirement of most CC members and the regime responded in similar fashion after a 1998 reorganization by arresting all members of the CC. The current CEC believes that reinvigorating the CC now would provide no benefit to the party and would simply provoke the SPDC.

--Convene a "Pyi Thu Hluttaw" (People's Parliament): The NLD won 395 of 485 seats in the 1990 elections and party members have always believed that the Parliament belongs rightfully to the pro-democracy movement. In 1998, the NLD formed the Committee to Represent the People's Parliament (CRPP), which included participants from 14 political parties. However, the SPDC responded with a massive wave of arrests, forced resignations, and prolonged repression. The CEC will mull over this recommendation, but is unlikely to take serious action. The NLD, however, plans to lead efforts to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the CRPP on September 16.

--A small, but vocal, number of NLD members apparently demanded that the CEC "politicize" an ongoing petition campaign to free party leaders and reopen party offices (ref C), press the international community to introduce the Burma question at the UN Security Council, and even consider moving the party toward an armed struggle against the military

regime. The CEC reportedly rejected these suggestions out of hand as being either impractical or against party objectives.

Comment: "We've Got Them Right Where We Want Them"

14. (C) According to a foreign diplomat in Rangoon, who has close contacts with the SPDC's military intelligence, the GOB recently completed a classified assessment of the NLD party for the SPDC leadership. The GOB analysis reportedly observes that the NLD has a rigid hierarchy that does not adhere to democratic practices within the party structure, has no tolerance for internal dissent, and is incapable of mounting a serious threat against the regime. Such barbs would sting the NLD leadership, which prides itself on transparency, inclusiveness, and a long-term commitment to a peaceful transition to democracy. However, the reported GOB analysis would be music to the generals' ears, affirming that the SPDC has successfully implemented a campaign of harassment, intimidation, and repression that has rendered the NLD harmless.

15. (C) We would maintain that the regime underestimates the NLD's reserve of support among the Burmese people and the capacity to remain a serious thorn in the thigh of totalitarian rule. Nonetheless, it is clear that with party leaders in detention, offices shuttered throughout the country, and lessening international pressure on the Burmese regime (especially on the part of ASEAN and other in the region), the NLD has hit an all-time low point. The growing chorus of voices from among the NLD's younger members demanding party action is one indication that the status quo is creating considerable frustration within the pro-democracy movement. End Comment.
Martinez